

**Employees' Perception towards the Business Advantages of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives of Ethiopian Brewery Industry**

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**Abstract**

*CSR, being focused more on customers and other related communities has generated a gap in finding and perceiving the business advantages by its own employees. The main objective of the study is to examine the perceived business advantages that the businesses have on account of implementing CSR programs from employees' perspectives. The descriptive cross sectional design with a survey method was used to serve the purpose of this study. The research was carried out with the sample consisting of five major brewery firms by drawing a sample of 429 respondents through convenience sampling. This study has concluded that adopting CSR behavior in brewery firms will offer the advantages to the industry with a significant development and betterment in market share, brand image, greater turnover/profit, sales, community relations, public image/reputation, new customers, customer loyalty, competitive advantage, quality employees, employees' loyalty and retention, employees' morale and motivation, access to capital, and minimized regulatory problems/restrictive regulations. This study suggests that brewery firms in Ethiopia should think strategically to exploit the opportunities of socially responsible practices.*

**Key words: CSR, Business Advantage, Employee Perception, Ethiopian Brewery.**

**I. Introduction**

The development of CSR concept has long and ever changing history passing through several periods. Corporate social responsibility (CSR here after) is a concept, whereby organizations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on all those stakeholders in all aspects of their operations. Business is a powerful engine of social change and CSR is a strategic concept for coping with change (Ramachandran, R., 2015). Several definitions of CSR entail corporate engagement with society, referring to one process by which a company states and develops its 'corporate culture' and 'social consciousnesses' (Rupp, et al, 2006). For instance, CSR can be expressed as activities, decisions, or policies that companies engage in order to influence positive social changes and environment sustainability (Aguleria et al., 2007), as well as the company's considerations of, and response to issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the company to achieve social and environmental advantages along with the traditional economic gains with which the company seeks (Davis and Blomstrom, 1971). Similarly, CSR is a set of management initiatives that ensures the company maximizing the positive effect of its operations on society or "operating in a manner that meets and exceeds the legal, ethical, commercial and public expectations that society has of business"(BSR, 2001). One of the most widely accepted and used definition of CSR is the one formulated by the European Commission in 2006 according to which "Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis".

A strong reason behind why firms are motivated to invest in the CSR program comes from the domain of stakeholder theory (Argandona, 1998; Freeman, 1984; Harvey and Schaefer, 2001; Post, 2003). Stakeholder theory asserts that corporations should be motivated not only to pursue profit maximization, but also other multiple objectives (Pirsch et al., 2007; Friedman, 1970) by meeting the needs of the company's different stakeholders; thus, corporations should manage and coordinate the various competitive and cooperative demands of stakeholders (Ruf et al., 2001; Freeman, 1984). In relation to this, CSR aims to define what responsibilities business ought to fulfill, the stakeholder concept addresses the issue of whom business is or should be accountable to, and both concepts are clearly interrelated (Kakabadse, et al., 2005).

The modern views as proposed by Quazi and O'Brien (2000), where the business maintains its relationship with the wider matrix of society and can achieve benefits both in the short term and in the long run from its socially responsible actions. Burke and Logsdon (1996) also argued that CSR activities can help to create strategic benefits. For example, CSR involvements by organizations could lead positive long term financial impact (Murray and Vogel, 1997). According to the book of Kotler and Lee (2005), there is a detailed discussion on how CSR engagements could help companies to increase sales and market share, reinforce the brand positioning, enhance corporate image, attract, motivate and retain employees, minimize operating costs and improve appeal to investors and financial analysts.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine the perceived business advantages that could have on account of practicing CSR by the brewery firms.

1. What is the Perception of employees on the expected business advantages of CSR programs of brewery firms?
2. How the demographical factors of employees such as age, gender, work experience and position influence the perception of employees toward the business advantages of CSR initiatives of the Ethiopian brewery industry?

## **II. Literature Review: Business Advantages of CSR Practice**

Authors in literature widely discussed on how companies can benefit from corporate social responsibility activities (Balcerowicz, 2015). For instance, Tsoutsoura (2004) noted that socially responsible companies have an enhanced brand image and reputation. Consumers are often attracted to brands and organizations with good reputations in CSR related issues. An organization viewed as socially responsible can also benefit from its reputation within the business community by having increased ability to attract capital and trading partners (Schiebel and Pochtrager, 2003). CSR as a dominant instrument improves the brand image and reputation of the business which leads to an improvement in sales and customer loyalty. Pfau et al's (2008) experimentation revealed that CSR campaigns improved people's perceptions of the organization's image, reputation and credibility. Likewise, Wang (2008) discovered positive CSR news has a positive effect on a corporation's image.

More and more investors are choosing to invest their funds in organizations that are demonstrating a high level of CSR (Baron, 2008). According to Waddock and Graves (1997), institutional investors are favorably inclined toward companies with higher corporate social performance. CSR can also affect accessibility to loan capital. Banks are developing more effective means to understand social and environmental risks when lending, underwriting or financing projects (McGuire et al, 1988). According to Balabanis et al (1998) a company's CSR practice seems to be a factor that impacts banks' investment decisions. Banks are utilizing social and environmental management systems into decision making, especially to manage their own reputation.

The organizations' functioning depends upon good employee relationship, which accounts for a lower rate, increase productivity, motivation and loyalty. According to Hopkins (2003) one of the most evident intangible benefits of engaging in CSR is enhanced employee morale, loyalty and satisfaction. Recent studies show that CSR is an important factor in attracting and retaining talented and diverse workforce (Globescan, 2005). Backhaus et al. (2002) stated in favor of the contention that CSR boosts a company's attractiveness to potential employees being found as the most influential areas of CSR consisted environmental issues, community relations and diversity policies. Turban and Greening (2000) also indicated that CSR can be mainly important in attracting high quality employees who have a high degree of employment option.

Consumers signify one of the most significant groups of stakeholders (Rugimbana et al, 2008). The customer is a key stakeholder for any company and the attraction and loyalty of this stakeholder is basic to any business. Pivato et al. (2008) found that consumer perceptions on organization's social responsibility are related to a higher level of trust in that organization and its products. This eventually leads to increased sales and enhanced customer loyalty. CSR has been emerged to influence consumer attitude toward the organization and its product. Company's commitment to a worthy cause is the most effective way to build brand loyalty among today's increasingly hard to please consumers (Dsilva, 2008). Brand is a company's most important asset that can be at risk in case of irresponsible behavior such as a consumer boycott. CSR is one of the effective ways to reduce the chances of customer boycott. Additionally, CSR results in increased sales, visibility, consumer loyalty, enhanced company image and positive media coverage.

When the government is fully aware that an organization or all organizations are alive to their responsibilities (social responsibilities), the government gets to be discouraged to regulate business. Government regulations may affect the business negatively, but when organizations know that they have a social responsibility to the community where they operate, there may be no need for regulation. Frederick (1998) argued that business from its own socially possible behavior can discourage new government restrictions; it is accomplishing a public good, as well as, its own private good.

When a company carries out corporate social initiatives, it makes more profit. Socially responsible businesses have more tendencies to secure long run profits. This is the normal result of the better community relations and improved business image. The proponents of social responsibility as social

obligation posit that a company participates in socially responsible practice when it thinks of profits only within the constraints of law (Asemah, et al 2013).

The main characteristics of CSR involve the way that an organization engages, involves and collaborates with its stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, debt holders, suppliers, customers, communities, non-governmental organizations and governments. To the extent that stakeholder's commitment and cooperation involve maintaining an open dialogue, being organized to form effective partnerships and demonstrating transparency, through measuring, accounting and reporting practices, the relationship between the business and the community in which it operates is likely to be more credible and trustworthy. Therefore, CSR can effectively improve an organization's relations with communities and thereby produce some key features that will improve business opportunities for its future (Asemah et al., 2013).

The term "competitive advantage" is best comprehended in the context of a differentiation strategy and firms may use CSR initiatives to set themselves apart from their competitors (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). Competitive advantage justifications contend that, by involving in certain CSR initiatives, organizations may enhance their competitiveness. Smith (2003) also affirmed that companies may build their competitive advantage through CSR strategies. He explains: 'company's social responsibility strategy, if genuinely and carefully conceived, should be unique'. The uniqueness may serve as a basis for setting the firm apart from its competitors and, accordingly, its competitive advantage.

To sum up organizations that carry out corporate social responsibility programs have certain advantages from certain performances such as increased sales, improved customer loyalty, increased ability to attract, motivate and retain employees, discouraged government regulation, increased access to capital, improved competitive advantage and improved relations with the investment community are among others.

### **III. Research Methodology**

Measurement of perceived advantage of CSR initiatives was performed by examining primary data source needed to collect data to determine the respondent's level of agreement on the given set of survey questionnaire provided to them. A quantitative method was appropriately applied where the research issue is clearly defined and the questions asked to respondents which lead to concise answers. Thus, the data collected was interpreted for drawing conclusions on the perceived business advantages of CSR initiatives based on a five point Likert scales. Responses were coded from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with 3 signaling indecision.

The research design of this study was basically cross-sectional design and sought to gather data only at the time of the survey, which was analyzed through quantitative methods. A descriptive and inferential statistical method was used to analyze the questionnaire survey. For the analysis of quantitative data, the researcher utilized SPSS version 20. The samples utilized in this study were drawn based on convenience. The participants have been working more than a year within the organization as full time employees and attended at least technical and vocational education (TVET) programs were selected. The five major brewery firms with more than ten years in the operation were identified and included in this survey study, such as BGI Ethiopia, Meta Abo Brewery (Diageo subsidiary), subsidiaries of Hieneken (Harar Brewery, Bedele Brewer), and Dashen Brewery. After the questionnaires were thoroughly reviewed, five hundred twenty five (525) copies were sent out as planned. Four hundred twenty nine (429) copies were fully completed and valid. A total of 96 (18.29%) questionnaires were invalid due to errors or incomplete responses or unreturned.

### **IV. Results And Discussions**

#### **4.1 Demographic profile of respondents**

As shown in the Table I, among 429 respondents, the majority (71.1 %) of respondents was male. 56.8% of the respondents were working for less than 6years, which were the majority. The majority of respondents (53.7%) were aged from 26 to 35. In relation to the respondents' position in their organization, the majority (64.3%) of employee respondents were from the lower position.

Table I: Demographic profile of respondents (N=429)

<b>Demographic variables</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender	Male	305	71.1
	Female	124	28.9
Age	18-25	111	25.9
	26-35	228	53.7
	36-45	75	17.5
	Over 45	15	3.5
Year of experience	Less than 6 years	244	56.8
	6 to 10 year	126	29.4
	Above 10 year	59	13.8
Position	Senior	39	9.1
	Middle	114	26.6
	Staff	276	64.3

Source: Survey result

#### 4.2 Perceived Business advantages of CSR practices

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement with given parameters which highlighted the business advantages of adopting CSR behavior in the brewery industry. As it was shown in the Table II, respondents have different level of perception about the business advantage that CSR behavior may bring to companies. For instance, there were respondents which represented 1.6% (n=7) indicated that socially responsible behavior does not bring any business advantages to the companies. However, there were a significant number of respondents has expressed their strong agreement on adopting CSR behavior that would bring numerous business advantages to the companies. In this case, there were high mean scores which ranging from 3.78 for the statement about CSR that minimizes regulatory problems/restrictive regulations to 4.20 for the statement concerning CSR that increases market share.

As shown in the Table II, a great majority of respondents (84.6%, n=363) agreed or strongly agreed that CSR improves market share with a high mean score of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 0.86. Overwhelming number of respondents (86%, n=369) conveyed their agreement about CSR which increases the 'brand image' of firms. In this case, the respondent rated a high mean score (4.16) with a standard deviation of 0.91. The results of this study have shown that more than three fourths of respondents widely agreed or strongly agreed that CSR offers greater turnover/profit (with rating a high mean score of 4.14 and a standard deviation of 0.88); increases sales (the respondents rated a high mean score of 4.11 with a standard deviation of 0.93) and improves community relations (respondents rated a high mean score of 4.06 with a standard deviation of 1.00). Finally, the study revealed that about two thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CSR minimizes regulatory problems/restrictive regulations with a high mean score of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.08. The finding of this study is consistent with the finding of Camilleri (2012) which found that CSR improves market share, increases brand image, offers greater profits, increases sales, improves community relations and minimizes regulatory problems.

The finding of this study depicted that the majority of respondents (79%) widely agreed that CSR improves public image/reputation. In this case, a high mean score (4.05) was recorded with a standard deviation of 1.03. Therefore, the finding of this study is congruent with that of Lancaster (2004) which found that reputation was the most cited advantage of CSR in a study of chief executives representing eighteen different sectors in sixteen countries and Pfau et al's (2008) experimentation also revealed that CSR campaigns enhanced people's perceptions of the company's image, reputation and credibility.

The customer is a key stakeholder for any company and the attraction and loyalty of this stakeholder is fundamental to any business. A company's commitment to a worthy cause is the most effective way to build brand loyalty among today's increasingly hard to please consumers (Dsilva, 2008). This ultimately

leads to increased sales and customer loyalty. Accordingly, respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CSR attracts new customers (with a high mean score of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 1.00) and improve customer loyalty (with a high mean score of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 0.93); which represented 76.3% and 64.8% respondents respectively.

Firms build a competitive advantage by engaging in those CSR initiatives that meet the perceived demands of stakeholders (Kurucz et al. 2008). The term competitive advantage basically is best understood in the context of a differentiation strategy and firms may use CSR practices to themselves apart from their competitors (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). As a result, three fourth of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CSR offers 'competitive advantage' for the firms. In this case, respondents rated a high mean score of 4.01 with a standard deviation of 0.99.

Recent surveys reveal that CSR is a significant factor in attracting and retaining talented and diverse workforce (Globescan, 2005). Backhaus et al.'s (2002) finding is in favor of the argument that CSR increases a firm's attractiveness to potential employees. According to Hopkins (2003) one of the most evidence intangible benefits of engaging in CSR is increased employee morale, loyalty and satisfaction. In line of the above findings and arguments, the finding of the current study with the respondents' agreed or strongly agreed statements revealed that CSR attracts quality employees (with a high mean score of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.97); enhances employees' loyalty (with a high mean score of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 1.07), and improves employees' morale and motivation (with a high mean score of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 1.13), which represented 73.9%, 69.2%, and 71.3% of respondents respectively.

More and more investors are choosing to invest their funds in organizations that are demonstrating a high level of CSR (Baron, 2008). According to Waddock and Graves (1997) research shows that institutional investors are favorably inclined toward companies with higher corporate social performance. This study also revealed that 72.2 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CSR improves access to capital. In this case, there was a high mean score of 3.99 with a standard deviation of 0.98.

Table II Perceived business advantages of CSR Initiatives (N=429)

<b><i>Business advantages of CSR</i></b>	<b><i>Agree/ Strongly agree (%)</i></b>	<b><i>Mean</i></b>	<b><i>Standard deviation</i></b>
Improves public image/reputation	79	4.05	1.03
Improves brand image	86	4.16	0.91
Increases market share	74.6	4.20	0.86
Improves community relation	76.5	4.06	1.00
Improves employee morale and motivation	71.3	3.85	1.13
Enhances employees loyalty	69.2	3.86	1.07
Attracts new quality employees	73.9	4.00	0.97
Improves customer loyalty	64.8	3.82	1.12
Increases sales	76.2	4.11	0.93
Additions of new customers	76.3	4.02	1.00
Offers competitive advantage	75.8	4.01	0.99
Minimizes regulatory problems/restrictive regulations	65.8	3.78	1.08
Improves access to capital (Banks or Investors)	72.2	3.99	0.98
Offers greater turnover/profit	80	4.14	0.88
Others	0.0	0.00	0.00
No benefit	1.6	1.66	0.74

*Source: survey result*



#### 4.3 Gender and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Table III depicts the relationship between gender and perceived advantages of CSR initiatives that improve both community relation and access to capital are showing statistical significance at the level of 0.05. Female respondents had perceived better on CSR that improves community relation and access to capital than male counterparts.

Table III. Gender and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Variables	Sex				F-Ration	Sign.
	Male		Female			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Community relation	3.99	1.09	4.23	0.74	4.854	0.028
Access to capital	3.90	1.00	4.19	0.87	7.233	0.007

Significant at the 0.05 level

#### 4.4 Age and Perceived Advantages of CSR

The relationship between age and the perceived advantages of CSR that improves public image, brand image and customer loyalty are statistically significant at the level of 0.05 as shown in the Table IV. The age group of “26 – 35” had perceived better on CSR that improves public image and brand image than other age groups. Respondents above the age of 45 have perceived better on CSR that improves customer loyalty.

Table IV. Age and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Variables	Age								F-Ration	Sign.
	18 – 25		26 – 35		36 – 45		Above 45			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Public Image	3.85	1.06	4.18	0.98	4.04	1.08	3.67	1.05	3.39	0.018
Brand Image	3.96	0.96	4.27	0.89	4.20	0.81	3.67	1.05	4.46	0.004
Customer Loyalty	3.65	1.18	3.75	1.13	4.17	0.95	4.33	1.10	4.91	0.002

Significant at the 0.05 level

#### 4.5 Position and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Table V shows the relationship between positions and perceived advantages of CSR that improves public image, brand image and customer loyalty are statistically significant at the level of 0.05. Those employees in the top position have perceived better on CSR that improves public image and customer loyalty than other positions. Brand image was being perceived maximum by the employees in the middle positions.

Table V. Position and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Variables	Position						F-Ration	Sign.
	Top level		Middle level		Lower level			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Public Image	4.33	0.93	4.19	1.00	3.95	1.05	3.84	0.022
Brand Image	4.28	0.92	4.33	0.62	4.07	1.00	3.82	0.023
Customer Loyalty	4.10	0.97	3.94	0.91	3.8	1.18	7.86	0.000

Significant at the 0.05 level

#### 4.6 Working experience and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Table VI portrays the relationship between employees' working experience and perceived advantages of CSR that improves community relation and customers' loyalty, attracts quality employees and new customers, and offers greater turnover are statistically significant at the level of 0.05. Employees having

more than 10 years working experience have perceived better on CSR that improves community relation and customer loyalty; and attracts quality employees. Employees with 6 to 10 year experience have perceived better on CSR that attracts new customers and offers greater turnover than other age groups.

Table VI. Working experience and Perceived Advantages of CSR

Variables	Work experience						F-Ration	Sign.
	0 – 5 yr		6 – 10		Above 10			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Community relation	4.00	1.04	4.03	1.06	4.35	0.64	2.931	0.033
Customer loyalty	3.66	1.22	3.94	0.95	4.27	0.82	5.878	0.001
Quality of employee	3.90	1.04	4.12	0.90	4.16	0.73	3.165	0.024
New customer	3.90	1.10	4.20	0.81	4.14	0.90	3.79	0.011
turnover	4.05	0.90	4.31	0.84	4.10	0.77	3.62	0.013

Significant at the 0.05 level

## V. Conclusion And Implication

The business advantages which are attributed to adopting CSR behavior were communicated in the survey questionnaire. In the main, the informants have indicated that corporate social responsibility resulted in substantial business advantage to the firm itself, as it supports their core business activities. The CSR initiatives, whether it is driven from a strategic intent or from 'posturing behavior' often results in improved relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Accordingly, this research has reported numerous business advantages of CSR engagements such as: increases market share, improves brand image, offers greater turnover/profit, increases sales, improves community relations, improves public image/reputation, attracts new customers, improves customer loyalty, offers competitive advantage, attracts quality employees, enhances employees' loyalty, improves employees' morale and motivation, improves access to capital, and minimizes regulatory problems/restrictive regulations.

This study suggests that brewery firms in Ethiopia should think strategically to exploit the opportunities of socially responsible practices. Besides, the firms which are engaged in social initiatives must promote their achievement so that the awareness of the stakeholders would be updated.

## VI. Limitations And Future Research Directions

The study uses only employees' respondents to determine the perceived advantage of CSR; future research can extend the survey to other stakeholders (customers, local community, investors and so on). From the above discussion, it is clear that CSR bestows the fourteen benefits as identified from the review of literature. These are not the exhaustive list of CSR benefits, but the future search will address other benefits of CSR including employees' retention reduction in operation Costs, minimizing risk, etc.

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